

April 29, 1981

POLAND: Party Plenum

*The plenum of the Polish party's Central Committee, which meets today, will provide important signs of how far the moderate Kania leadership will go to meet demands for rapid, far-reaching party reform.* [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the party leadership will respond to a key demand of the reformers by proposing that the party congress be held from 14 through 18 July and that delegates be elected by secret ballot from an unlimited number of candidates. These new procedures, combined with the traditional practice of electing some delegates directly from the factories, increase the risk that the party leadership will not be able to guide the congress and that radical reformers will have substantial influence. [REDACTED]

How the party leadership will react to demands that observers from large factories attend the plenum is unclear. Some factory party organizations will be in a state of "readiness" to follow the debates and to issue commentary. Reformers may again demand the removal of hardliners, but the leadership probably will respond with proposals that only additions be made to the Politburo or that all personnel decisions be postponed until the congress. [REDACTED]

The plenum will demonstrate whether the reformers can capitalize on the momentum they have created since its previous meeting in late March. The reformers--strongest at the rank-and-file level--have continued to voice demands for greater participation in party decisionmaking. Since the meeting in Torun on 15 April, local party organizations in at least two other regions have held or considered holding meetings to coordinate their efforts to put pressure on the central party apparatus. [REDACTED]

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The party leaders have given limited approval to this reinvigoration of local party activity, but they are trying to limit it. Coordination at the local party level runs counter to a basic principle of democratic centralism--that lower level organizations simply obey orders from higher level party authorities. Politburo member Barcikowski, one of the more liberal members of the leadership, yesterday publicly warned reformers not to press too hard. He said the Torun meeting had seriously weakened Moscow's faith in the party's ability to overcome the crisis. [REDACTED]

The July date for the congress may be another setback for Moscow's efforts to influence Polish events. [REDACTED] Soviet Politburo member Suslov made an effort during his visit to Warsaw last week to have the congress postponed. The Soviets had urged postponement because of the disarray in the party. [REDACTED]